XI
TEN BASES OF MERITORIOUS ACTION (*DASA PUNNA-KIRIYA VATTHU*)

INTRODUCTION

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1. Unwholesome and Wholesome Roots (*Akusala Kusala Hetu*)

Three roots of evil have been taught by the Buddha to be the basic causes of all suffering. They are:

- **Greed (*Lobha*),**
- **Hate (*Dosa*) and**
- **Delusion (*Moha*)**

These three terms comprise the entire range of evil, whether of lesser or greater intensity: from a faint tendency to the coarsest manifestation.

There are also three roots of everything good:

- **Non-Greed (*Alobha*)** = unselfishness, generosity, renunciation
- **Non-Hate (*Adosa*)** = loving kindness, patience, compassion
- **Non-Delusion (*Amoha*)** = knowledge, insight, wisdom.

2. Meritorious Action (*Punna-kiriya*)

All actions originate from the mind. The body and speech function merely as doors by which the mind expresses itself. The ancients defined ***punna* or merit** as: 'that which purifies or cleanses the mind'. From the description of the roots of good and evil, it becomes clear that the good or wholesome roots are the causes of merit. Thus meritorious actions are volitional or mental actions accompanied by the 3 wholesome roots of non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion. Conversely, demeritorious actions are volitional actions accompanied by the 3 unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion. In simple language, they constitute wholesome and unwholesome *kamma* respectively.

In *Abhidhamma*, there are **eight types** of **wholesome consciousness** (***sobhana citta***) pertaining to the Sensual Sphere (*Kamavacara*). Four of them contain only two wholesome roots (non-greed, non-

hate) while another four contain all three wholesome roots (non-greed, non-hate, **non-delusion or understanding**). Each group is further sub-divided according to whether they are **prompted** or **unprompted** and whether they are **accompanied by joy** or **indifference.** In the ultimate sense, these 8 types of wholesome consciousness comprise all the meritorious actions or wholesome *kamma* pertaining to the Sensual Sphere. These eight types of wholesome consciousness are shown below.

a) Accompanied by joy, prompted, with understanding
b) Accompanied by joy, prompted, without understanding
c) Accompanied by joy, unprompted, with understanding
d) Accompanied by joy, unprompted, without understanding
e) Accompanied by indifference, prompted, with understanding
f) Accompanied by indifference, prompted, without understanding
g) Accompanied by indifference, unprompted, with understanding
h) Accompanied by indifference, unprompted without understanding

3. Ten Bases of Meritorious Action (*Dasa Punna-kiriya Vatthu*)

If one wants to accumulate wholesome *kamma* in this life, there are ten bases or ways (*Dasa vatthu*) of meritorious action (*Punna-kiriya*) that produce good effects and which should be performed by all means.

i) ***Dana***: giving charity or generosity
ii) ***Sila***: morality i.e. observing 5 precepts, 8 or 10 precepts, etc.
iii) ***Bhavana***: meditation i.e. both tranquility and insight
iv) ***Apacayana***: reverence to elders and holy persons
v) ***Veyyavacca***: service in wholesome deeds
vi) ***Pattidana***: sharing or transference of merits
vii) ***Pattanumodana***: rejoicing in others' merits
viii) ***Dhamma-savana***: listening to the Doctrine
ix) ***Dhamma-desana***: teaching the Doctrine
x) ***Ditthijukamma***: straightening out one's view.

The ten bases of meritorious action can be classified into 3 groups:

- *Dana* or **Generosity** group: *Dana,* Sharing of merits and Rejoicing in others' merits.
- *Sila* or **Morality** group: *Sila*, Reverence and Service
- *Bhavana* or **Meditation** group: Meditation, Listening to the Doctrine, Teaching the Doctrine and Straightening one's view

(a) The *Dana* group represents '*alobha*' which means generosity or renunciation. It opposes **jealousy** and **stinginess or selfishness**.

(b) The *Sila* group represents '*adosa*' which means good-will. It opposes **attachment (*lobha*)** and **anger (*dosa*)**.

(c) The *Bhavana* group represents '*amoha*' which means wisdom or understanding. It opposes **delusion** and **wrong views**.

The ten bases of meritorious action are performed with the eight types of wholesome consciousness unless one attains *Jhana* (absorption) or *Magga* (Path consciousness) in meditation. So they generally give rise to wholesome *kamma* pertaining to the Sensual Sphere.

4. Types of Wholesome *Kamma*

(a) **Two-Root and Three-Root Wholesome *Kamma***

If one performs a wholesome deed with the knowledge of *Kamma* and its effects, then the wholesome consciousness is associated with understanding. The volition will be accompanied with all three wholesome roots: non-greed, non-hate, non-delusion. So **three-root**

(***tihetuka***) wholesome *kamma* is acquired. Better still, if during the performance of moral deeds, one can develop **insight knowledge** by reasoning that everything is impermanent, suffering and non-self. The wholesome *kamma* acquired is again accompanied by the three good roots.

On the other hand, if one performs a wholesome deed without any knowledge of *Kamma* and its effects, he is doing it **without any understanding.** Then the volition will not be accompanied by non-delusion, but only the two roots of non-greed and non-hate. So **two-root** (***dvihetuka***) *kamma* is acquired.

(b) **Superior and Inferior Wholesome *Kamma***

In the performance of the ten bases of meritorious action, one's **volition** or intention **before and after** the moral action is very important. If one can develop wholesome consciousness before and after the moral action, then the moral volition behind the moral action is surrounded by other good volitions and consequently its **potentiality is strengthened.** The wholesome *kamma* acquired will be **superior** (*ukkatha*).

To acquire this type of superior *kamma*, one should think of the moral action in advance and feel glad for having the chance to do it. Again after performing the action, one should reflect on it and be full of joy thinking about the good aspects of the deed.

On the other hand, if one feels lazy or reluctant or jealous or stingy before a moral action such as giving charity, and regrets doing the moral action afterwards, then the moral volition of giving charity will be surrounded by other unwholesome volitions and consequently its **potentiality will be weakened.** The wholesome *kamma* acquired in this case is **inferior** (*omaka*).

Thus, four types of wholesome *kamma* are acquired in performing the ten bases of meritorious action, namely:

i) **Superior Three-Root *Kamma***
ii) **Inferior Three-Root *Kamma***
iii) **Superior Two-Root *Kamma***
iv) **Inferior Two-Root *Kamma***

Each of the four types can be performed with **joy** or **indifference** making a total of eight types of wholesome consciousness. Of the four, (i) is **best.** If it conditions the rebirth consciousness, the person will be reborn with **three wholesome roots** (*tihetuka*) in the happy realms of humans and *devas* and will possess the ability to attain *Jhana* (Mental Absorption) and *Magga* (Path Consciousness).

(ii) and (iii) are **somewhat equal**. If it conditions the rebirth consciousness, the person will be reborn with **two wholesome roots** (***dvihetuka***) in the happy realms of humans and *devas*. But he will not possess the ability to attain *Jhana* and *Magga.*

(iv) is the poorest. If it conditions the rebirth consciousness, the person will be reborn in the happy course of existence (*sugati*) but without any good root ***(ahetuka***) as a human being with deformities or as an earth-bound degraded *deva* in the lower realm of *Catumaharajika* or the Four Great Kings.

5. Classification of Individuals (*Puggala-bheda*)

Puggala means individual or person. In *Abhidhamma*, individuals are classified into twelve types, consisting of four types of *puthujjana* (world-lings) and eight types of *ariya-puggala* (noble individuals), namely:

i) ***Duggati ahetuka puggala*** – refers to individuals born in the woeful states of existence i.e. the four lower worlds, namely, animal, ghost, demon realm and hell. Such individuals do not possess any of the three good roots in their consciousness, namely: non-greed (*alobha*), non-hate (*adosa*) and non-delusion (*amoha*). Hence they are termed '***ahetuka* or rootless**'.

ii) ***Sugati ahetuka puggala*** – refers to individuals who are born with deformities in the happy realm of human world or the lower realm of *Catumaharajika* but do not possess any good root.

iii) ***Dvihetuka puggala*** – refers to human beings and *devas* who are born with only two good roots, namely: non-greed and non-hate. Such individuals cannot attain *jhanas* (mental absorptions) and *maggas* (path consciousness) in the present life however much they try. However, they may become '*tihetuka puggala*' in the next life as a result of their meditation efforts in the present life, and then attain *jhanas* and *maggas* easily if they meditate again.

iv) ***Tihetuka puggala*** – refers to human beings and *devas* who are born with all three good roots: non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion. Such individuals may attain all the *jhanas* and all the *maggas* if they strenuously practise tranquility and insight meditations. Thus, three-rooted worldlings can attain the various stages sainthood by the practice of *Vipassana* meditation.

v) ***Sotapatti maggatha*** – path consciousness of 1st Sainthood

vi) ***Sotapatti phalattha*** – fruition consciousness of 1st Sainthood

vii) ***Sakadagami maggattha*** – path consciousness of 2nd Sainthood

viii) ***Sakadagami phalattha*** – fruition consciousness of 2nd Sainthood

ix) ***Anagami maggattha*** – path consciousness of 3rd Sainthood

x) ***Anagami phalattha*** – fruition consciousness of 3rd Sainthood

xi) ***Arahatta maggattha*** – path consciousness of Final Sainthood

xii) ***Arahatta phalattha*** – fruition consciousness of Final Sainthood

6. References

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2) The Essence of Buddha *Abhidhamma* by Dr. Mehm Tin Mon.